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BISHOP

California

CURTIS PHILLIPS PHOTO

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"Front cover shows Mt. Tom
as seen from Bishop."

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Bishop, California

By Mrs. W. C. Parcher

Many years ago, in fact about 1910, a young lady stepped up to the railroad ticket office in San Francisco and asked the sober-faced clerk for a ticket to Bishop.

"Where in hell is Bishop?" he demanded.

"*You* should know," she said. "*I* don't, but my folks have just moved there and they went on a train. Anyway, its not in the place you just spoke of; they're not that kind of people."

After considerable head scratching, thumbing of time tables and mumbling to himself and other clerks behind the cage the fellow exclaimed, "Well, by gosh, there *is* such a town, and it's on the railroad, too!"

She told the story to so many people from San Francisco to Los Angeles, that the query, "Where in hell is Bishop?" became a by-word among travelling and railroad men all over this state and Nevada, giving the little town a lot of advertising.

There really was a little narrow gauge railroad, named by Mrs. Steven McGroarty the "Slim Princess", which chugged along over the mountains from Nevada to Laws, five miles east of Bishop. From here passengers made the rest of the journey by stage. A small part of this railroad line still hauls ore trains up and down Owens Valley.

Bishop, metropolis of Inyo County and Eastern California, altitude 4,150, city of the sixth class, though just a tree-topped tourist town, due to its location in the heart of historical and romantic Owens Valley, and the character of its enterprising and public spirited people, has many friends in many states and countries.

The Masons, I.O.O.F., Eastern Stars, Rebekahs, Neighbors of Woodcraft, and Elks welcome visiting qualified members, and local branches of Rotary, Lions, 20-30 Club, P.T.A., Fed-

erated Women's Clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and other service and social clubs take a lively interest in civic affairs. Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic, Christian Science, Seventh Day Adventist, and Church of the Nazarene services are held in these respective churches on Sunday, and lots of people don't go fishing till after church.

The climate is ideal, summer and winter, with average temperatures ranging in comfortable registers, only once 105 in summer and once 4 below zero in winter. But the old timers will have to admit that once on the Fourth of July many years ago, there came a six inch snowfall that started that story about "unusual California weather".

It seems that the good ladies of the Methodist Church had arranged for a "strawberry sociable" on the church lawn. There was much scurrying around, as the tables were all set, ready for those luscious homegrown strawberries on home made icecream. The men were hurriedly called on to assist, and the "lawn" party retired to the church.

Mary Austin, the novelist, called this country, the subject of one of her books, "Land of Little Rain" and rightly, as the average rainfall is five inches a year. The theory for its dryness is that the moist winds which come in from the Pacific hit the high barrier of the Sierra and deposit their life giving rainfall on the west slope.

Even in winter when the mountains get their blanket of snow in the storms from December to March, there is very little snow in the valley. But occasionally there is a real bumper crop of three feet or so, when the youngsters can practice skiing in their own front yards.

Summer evenings a cool breeze always sweeps down from the eternal snows and makes Bishop forget it is surrounded by sun-baked desert. In the winter when the White Mountains, which divide this valley from Nevada on the east, and the towering Sierra Nevada on the west are bristling with icy spires rising from slopes covered with deep featherbeds of snow, the daily

glow of the sunshine takes the keen edge off of the nip of the clean, invigorating air.

GEOLOGY

The Alps of America as this section of the Sierra is often called, has some of the highest snow crowned heads in the U.S. Mt. Tom (Ow-Wah-Ne) is Bishop's own mountain, as it is visible from every street in town looking west. Its elevation is 13,649 feet above sea level. Mt. Humphrey, farther back in the range to the southwest looks like a tilted truncated cone. Its height is 13,972. Between these two peaks is Basin Mountain, elevation 13,229 feet.

The White Mountains may have received their name from the white shaft of Mt. Montgomery, elevation 13,485 feet on the northern end of the range. White Mountain Peak, elevation 14,242 feet, is the symmetrical and colorful peak which so strikingly tops the White Mountain range northeast of Bishop.

The country in a radius of 20 miles around Bishop is a geologist's paradise. Geologic formations tell of Nature's tantrums over a period of millions of years. At least two ice epochs left behind them the Big Pine Glacier, to be reached from Glacier Lodge at Big Pine, and the Gilbert Glacier, plainly seen from Parchers Camp on Bishop Creek. When the glaciers had ground their way down the mountain sides, they formed big alluvial fans touching the valley floor. Here are many volcanic cones and areas of volcanic ash. Red Hill, three miles west on the Bishop Creek road, and Black Mountain at Big Pine are the most spectacular. These are thought to be of recent origin, possibly only 4000 years old.

A wide variety of minerals in both ranges brought renown and riches to Bishop. Gold, silver and quicksilver were the first minerals sought; later tungsten, molybdenum, sillimanite and other minerals, talc, pumice and various clays such as bentonite proved of commercial value. During World War II, Bishop was the tungsten center of the world, the government erecting a

$1,000,000 mill to handle this ore so valuable for hardening steel.

The student seeking specimens will find fossils, petrified bones of prehistoric animals, everything from fine marbles and obsidian or volcanic glass, which the Indians used for arrow points, to pumice pebbles so light that they will float in water.

Eight miles south of Bishop is Keough's Hot Springs with medicinal baths and open-air pool and dance floor. It is one of a series of such springs bubbling forth from the crack in the earth's crust made by the upthrusting Sierra Nevada. Whitmore's Pool, Hot Creek and Casa Diablo Geyser near Mammoth are of similar origin.

HISTORY

Most mysterious of all the features of this area are the hundreds of prehistoric rock carvings and picture rocks which are to be found north of Bishop. One such is close to the main road and has a highway sign. Nearby on a tuff cliff is painted a series of little red hands. At Fish Slough and in Chalfant Valley are to be found some of the largest petroglyphs or rock pictures in the world, the work of a vanished race, unexplainable by the present day Indians. Persons interested in American archaeology should visit the Eastern California Museum in the County Court House at Independence, thirty-eight miles south of Bishop, through whose efforts 10,000 acres of land were withdrawn from entry for mining claims to thus protect by federal law these areas of antiquity as an outdoor museum.

According to the "Story of Inyo" by W. A. Chalfant, the first white man to travel through Owens Valley was Jedediah Smith in 1826. It is said that he discovered gold in Mono County two decades before Sutter made his discovery. Next came Joe Walker and his party and various wandering prospectors. In 1845 General Fremont, entering the valley from the north, named the river, valley and lake "Owens" in honor of a trusted officer, Lt. Richard Owens, who never saw his namesakes. Fremont said of him that he was "cool, brave and of good judgment."

Bishop Creek was named by Samuel Bishop who came from Fort Tejon in 1861 with six hundred head of cattle and five horses, arriving at Bishop Creek August 22nd. With him were his wife and other venturesome relatives and friends. They felled pine trees and built two cabins in the shadow of Mt. Tom in what is now known as West Bishop. They named their place St. Francis Ranch. The party encountered many hostile Indians, and lost a large share of the cattle to them. Later the site of the present town was selected as a better location and the name "Bishop" was adopted. Indian troubles continued for years, but gradually the better type of settlers won the confidence and regard of the Indians.

In 1872 the most violent earthquake in the history of the U.S. shook this valley, with great loss of life and property. The earth shook intermittently for weeks, and huge cracks, landslips and falscarps appeared.

The gold rush of 1906 to Tonapah and Goldfield just over the White Mountains in Nevada brought high prices for farm products to Bishop ranchers, and from then until the City of Los Angeles bought up the ranch land for water rights, agriculture flourished.

To furnish power for these Nevada mines the Nevada-California Power Co. began construction of the five plants on Bishop Creek. Today their high tension lines carrying 110,000 volts, stretch to the southern boundary of California and over into Mexico.

About 1910 the fast expanding City of Los Angeles, which for several years had cast a covetous eye on the abundant water supply of the valley, began to buy up farm lands in order to secure the water rights.

After the Los Angeles aqueduct was finished more and more water was required and more and more land was purchased including Bishop town property. Many residents who loved the valley refused to sell until the drying up of ranches all around them forced them to give up their homes and move away. Bishop suffered extensively from the ruin of its back country but gradually

converted itself into a recreation and mountain playground center.

One oldtimer recalled a heyday Harvest Festival. "Why, doggone it, they built a great big building all out of baled alfalfa. Towers on the corners, yes sir, and it was so big they used it for the exhibit hall. Booths and tables heaped with vegetables, jars of preserves and pickles, good alfalfa honey (you just can't beat that honey) and apples that used to take first prize at the *state* fair, by golly! Just about where Joseph's store is now, and all lit up with electric lights, too. The good old days before . . .oh well—."

"The streets were lined with hitching racks, upsy-downsy wooden sidewalks and watering troughs. "Vondy's" Red Front was the favorite hangout on Main Street. Fellows used to sit on the edge of the sidewalk and talk and smoke and spit Then suddenly someone would jump up fightin' mad. A quart or so of cold water had just been poured down the back of his levis."

"And coffee! Uncle Harry Vonderheide made the slickest coffee you ever drank, Arbuckle's Best, and only 20 cents a sack."

In 1910 a broad gauge railroad was built from Los Angeles to Lone Pine, sixty miles south of Bishop, where it connected with the narrow gauge. Improved highways began to bring thousands of vacationists to Inyo (Paiute for "Dwelling Place of a Great Spirit"). The Forest Service established convenient and sanitary campgrounds, and resorts sprang up on lakes and streams. Spring and summer bring the fishermen, fall the hunters and winter snow lovers find some of the best skiing in the state near Bishop, where ski lifts, easy or breath-taking slopes and roaring log fires in nearby lodges beckon the skiers.

Three special days each year appeal to Bishop fans. May 1st is always a school holiday, the opening of the fishing season. At dawn the poles and lines begin to whip the mountain waters, and in the evening literally thousands of people line up to view the truly magnificent display of fish on iced trays, so ably

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organized by the Rainbow Club. At a late hour trophies are awarded for the "bests" of all kinds and limits.

"Homecoming" is during the Labor Day week-end, when all who possibly can of the families who have moved away, gather in Bishop for a barbecue of the finest local Grade A beef. A rodeo, dance, parade and featured entertainment make this a gala occasion.

The "Good Fellow's Club" was founded by Charley Curtis, a public-spirited citizen who thought rich and poor, Indian and white, *all* children should be made happy at Christmas. In his memory each year, as when he lived, red ribbons are sold for $1.00 and presents are distributed from a community tree by Santa Claus.

FISHING

How doth the pretty speckled trout
Delight to splash and squirm,
And coyly play around the hook
Where hangs a nice fat worm.

Everyone in Bishop talks fish. This is natural as the country around Bishop is one of the best trout fishing spots in all of California. Hundreds of thousands of fishermen go through Bishop every year on their way to their favorite lakes and streams. Fishing is as much a major industry here as at an oceanside port. Everyone is affected, from the small boy who sells worms by the side of the road at $1.00 a hundred, to the employees of stores, hotels and service stations which maintain twenty-four hour service during the fishing season.

Man brought the first trout to the Bishop area back in 1878, when cut-throat and rainbow were planted in Owens River from streams on the west slope of the Sierra.

In recent years the California Fish and Game Commission each summer as early as possible plants thousands of fish of many kinds. They are hauled from the three Inyo hatcheries at Independence, Black Rock and Hot Creek in refrigerated tanks and scattered with great care, some being carried in tall

cans of icy water on horseback, to the higher lakes and streams. The main varieties planted are: Rainbow, Steelhead, Loch Leven, Eastern Brook, Golden, Black Spotted Tahoe, Cutthroat and Dolly Varden.

The main streams crossing highway 395 from Big Pine Creek north are Bishop Creek, Pine, Rock, Crooked, Whiskey, Hilton, McGee, Convict, Hot, Deadman, Rush, Leevining Creeks, but don't forget, fishermen, the best fishing is back away from the traveled roads.

Owens River has its source in Mono County and parallels the highway down the valley, Above Bishop it rushes through a precipitous canyon 800 feet deep in places, with a flow of 50,000 acre feet. The 5 to 6 lb. fish in the river provide excellent sport.

The largest fish reputed to have been caught in the entire area is a 27 lb. trout taken many years ago from Convict Lake by a woman. A 17 lb. trout was recently caught in Crowley Lake.

There are four main resort areas near Bishop: Crowley Lake-Rock Creek, Mammoth, June Lake and Bishop Creek. The first three regions have many fine resorts located on lakes and streams, and can be reached by following number 395 north about thirty to sixty miles into Mono County. Nearer to Bishop are the Bishop Creek resorts, reached by turning west at the main bank corner and traveling up beautiful Bishop Creek to its headwaters. About fourteen miles from town the stream divides into north fork and south fork. The north fork road leads to Lake Sabrina and North Lake where the road ends; the south fork to South Lake situated at an elevation of 10,000 feet. On both forks are resorts catering to fishing enthusiasts and other vacationists who spend their evenings around the open fires, telling tall tales of the high country and the fish that got away. Nearly eighty other good fishing lakes are within hiking and horseback distance of these resorts.

PACKING

As soon as the ice and snow have melted from the high moun-

tain trails, packers located at the resorts near the ends of auto roads begin outfitting and guiding parties of fishermen—and women—to the more inaccessible lakes and streams far back in virgin wilds. These packers who are banded together in the High Sierra Packers Association have a high code of ethics. The aim of the association is to have high grade stock and courteous packers who know the mountains, how to handle the animals, how to make a comfortable camp and cook a good campfire meal. And some of them are top entertainers around the campfire.

HUNTING

The best deer hunting is in the back country away from the roads. Experienced packers can be secured to take hunters to the best locations. Stores and service stations have information on seasons, limits, weapons, and fire permits. As these regulations change yearly, hunters should acquire accurate information before getting into trouble with the game wardens.

Game birds such as chinese pheasants, hungarian partridge, grouse, etc. have been planted, and these birds with native dove and quail live on the valley floor and in lower canyons. Migratory birds such as wild geese, and many varieties of duck are found on marshy wastes and pools.

WILD LIFE

Many shy models are game for the hunter with a camera; coyote, skunk, civet cat, porcupine, ground hog, martin, weasel, tame little chipmunk (he's the one with the stripe running to his nose), ground squirrel (his stripe runs to the shoulder), jack rabbit, cottontail, rare snowshoe rabbit which often touches the ground when slung over your shoulder by his ears, fox, swift, and occasionally bob cat, mountain sheep and mountain lion far back in the peaks. As for rodents such as packrats, mice, etc., scientists say there are more varieties here than anywhere in the U.S.

Birds common around Bishop are: sparrows, robin, crow, magpie, redwinged and Brewer blackbird, roadrunner, hawk,

owl, dove, wren, junco, meadow lark, humming bird, raven, killdeer and chickadee. Other rarer bird visitors are cowbird, bluebird, finch, canyon wren, towhee, ouzel, thrush, pinecrow, waxwing, warbler, tanager, grosbeak, wild canary, catbird, kingfisher, oriole, martin, sandpiper, swallow, horned lark, butcherbird, seagull and a few white heron.

Owing to the varied topography, this region has a period of flowering lasting from early spring in the valley to a gradual blooming up through the canyons and mountain sides to above the timberline in August. Among the early arrivals are pussywillow, violet, Indian paint brush, lupine, wild iris, creosote bush, mallow, mariposa lily, larkspur, Jimpson weed, dandelion, penstemon, wild peach, wild rose, scarlet bugler and matilija poppies. Later come shooting star, monkshood, gilia, gentian, wild sweet pea, tiger lily, blazing star, thistle, daisy, columbine, milk weed, wall flower, evening primrose, sun flower, pirola, Alpine polemonium, monkey flower, St. Michaelmas daisy, rabbit brush, wild delphinium, and countless other varieties.

INDIANS

A mile west of Bishop can be seen the neat pumice tile houses and well kept farms of one of the largest Indian resettlement projects in the U.S. Here live Paiute Indians whose ancestors were the original settlers of this valley some thousands of years ago. Land and water for the project were secured through a trade with the City of Los Angeles which owns almost all the land in Owens Valley. Money for the construction of houses and farms was secured through a grant from the federal government.

The Paiutes at Bishop are for the most part hardworking, industrious people. They have advanced farther than almost any other tribe in the U.S. Their homes are furnished with electrical equipment and modern bathrooms and they own and operate up-to-date farm machinery. Their children attend the public schools in Bishop and many go on to college.

While these Indians have adopted many of the white man's

ways, they still cling to many old Indian customs. Both Paiute and English are spoken in their homes and the old folks still tell the young people legends of their forefathers. Beautiful Indian willow baskets, some beaded with lovely original Indian designs can still be purchased in local stores but this craft is fast becoming a lost art.

When white men first arrived these Indians lived in dome shaped houses made of woven brush, willow and tules, braced on the outside with circles of large stones. The low doors traditionally faced the sunrise. They wore scanty garments of woven sagebrush fiber and animal skins. Sandals and leggings of processed sagebrush bark completed the costume.

Due to the arid nature of the country food was scarce. Bows and arrows were used to bring down game, insects were dried, small animals were trapped, sometimes in quantities by organized drives. Seeds were gathered and pinenuts furnished a staple flour. They developed methods of cooking in baskets with hot rocks shaken back and forth.

Peyagies or pine worms about thumb size, were considered a delicacy when roasted. In July these worms crawl down the pine trees to make cocoons in the ground. The Indians build a small fire around a likely tree and the worms crawl out on the coals and roast themselves.

"Mono Lake Shrimp" is the larva stage of a small fly, esteemed for its salty flavor when dried. The Indians eat them like salted peanuts. "Peyhabie" or sugar was obtained by cooking the small insects which feed on a wild cane which grows in well watered spots. They were formed into balls like maple sugar cakes to supply a primitive Indian candy.

These were the only Indians of California to develope any irrigation. They would build a primitive dam where seed producing grasses grew, divert the water, gather up all the fish in the dry stream bed, knock out the dam, and in turn gather up all the fish stranded in the meadow. Some of these diversion ditches were so well planned that they are followed today by modern irrigation canals.

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